

Virginia Veterans News

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Serving Virginia's Veterans Since 1942

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From the Commissioner's Desk . . . Governor Mark Warner has proposed budget amendments that would provide funding for additional Veterans Service Representatives, veterans cemetery staff and accounting personnel. If passed, the funding proposals will increase the current DVS budget by approximately 24%, which represents the first, major step forward in over twelve years. Delegate Kirk Cox, a member of the Board of Veterans Services, also has introduced two budget amendments – one would improve service delivery – and the other would provide for the Commonwealth's monetary share of restoring the 80 domiciliary beds that were cut from the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond due to increased construction costs. Another Board member, Delegate Mark Cole, introduced legislation that would strengthen a state and local government veterans hiring preference.

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Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center Update

The Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center project is moving forward. The Attorney General's Office and the USDVA are in the process of constructing language to complete the legal transfer of the property from the McGuire VAMC to the Commonwealth. DVS and Department of General Services staff are working hard to meet project deadlines so that groundbreaking may take place this spring.

New VA Health Eligibility Web Site

A new VA web site was launched on January 10, 2005. <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/home/hecmmain.asp>. This site is the VA's authoritative source for information on veterans health benefits eligibility and enrollment. For more information, contact Lynne Harbin at (404) 235-1318 or at lynne.harbin@med.va.gov.

Veterans Cemeteries

The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk is receiving a great deal of attention from veterans and their families in the Tidewater area. December saw 34 burials, with 47 in January.

The Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia, which serves veterans in Central Virginia, performed 18 burials in December and 16 in January. To learn more about the Amelia cemetery, contact cemetery superintendent Cindy Van Bibber, at (804) 561-1475 or at cindy.vanbibber@dvs.virginia.gov.

SAA to participate in Job Fair

The State Approving Agency (SAA) will participate in the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce Armed Forces Job Fair on April 28, 2005, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., at the Holiday Inn Business Center in Hampton. The event is designed to provide veterans with information on VA education benefits, including on-the-job training and apprenticeships. For more information, contact James Reavis at (804) 225-2720 or james.reavis@dvs.virginia.gov

DVS to Hold Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits

DVS will hold the following Supermarkets this year:

April 21 – South Boston Volunteer Fire Department
Support Center

June 23 – Holiday Inn Hotel, Norton, Virginia

August 24 – Wytheville Community Center

October 20 – Rappahannock Community College,
Warsaw Campus

All events will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Supermarkets are designed to bring benefits information to veterans residing in more remote areas of the state that are not served by DVS field offices or itinerate service points. Numerous state, federal and private partners will participate in the events. For more information, visit www.dvs.virginia.gov or contact Steve Combs at steven.combs@dvs.virginia.gov or at (804) 786-0286.

Virginia Veterans Claims

For the second quarter (October – December 2004) of State Fiscal Year 2005, DVS reported:

- ★ 1,830 decisions received
- ★ 1,305 claims granted, a 71.31 % grant rate
- ★ \$7,064,494 in retroactive claims for 358 veterans
- ★ 20 large awards of over \$50,000

Combat-Related Special Compensation

Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) is a tax-free benefit available for retirees of all services with military or U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rated disabilities resulting directly from armed conflict, especially hazardous military duty training exercises that simulate war, or an instrumentality of war.

To learn more or apply for CRSC benefits, go to www.crsc.army.mil or call the toll-free number at (866) 281-3254, or (703) 325-5163 in the DC metro area.

Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004

On December 10, 2004, President Bush signed Public Law 108-454, the *Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004*. A **few** highlights of the legislation include:

- ★ Increases Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to surviving spouses with one or more children under the age of 18 by \$250 for two years, or until the youngest child reaches the age of 18.
- ★ Increases the maximum VA loan guaranty amount for loans over \$144,000; authorizes the VA to guarantee traditional adjustable rate mortgages; exempts certain veterans from the home loan funding fee; and extends the full \$50,000 specially adapted housing grant to veterans who have lost the use of both upper extremities.

For more information on this legislation, go to www.gibill.va.gov/education/VBIA2004.htm. For information on the VA home loan guaranty program go to www.homeloans.gov.

President's Budget Proposal

President Bush has submitted his Fiscal Year 2006 budget proposal to Congress. Generally, the proposal has not been well received by veterans organizations, because it creates enrollment fees for health care and increases co-payments. The budget proposal also includes new funding restrictions on state veterans homes.

Means Test Thresholds Increase

The USDVA recently adopted new Means Test Thresholds, effective January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005, ranging from \$25,842 for Below Means Test Threshold for veterans with no dependents, to \$37,950 Above Means Test Threshold for Veterans with five dependents. The dependent threshold amount increase for two or more dependents is \$1,734. For more information on the Means Test Thresholds, go to <http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/publications.cfm?pub=1>.

Lung Cancer Linked to Gulf War Service

A study by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) reported evidence that confirms a link between lung cancer and combustion products pertaining to service during the Persian Gulf War. The IOM reported the available evidence is too sparse or of insufficient quality to determine whether the majority of health problems that may be experienced by Gulf War veterans could be associated with exposures to fuels for military vehicles, propellants in Scud missiles, or substances given off by combustion sources such as oil-well fires, exhausts, and tent heaters, according to the latest report on the Gulf War and associated potential health from the Institute of Medicine. However, data

from studies of occupational and environmental exposures to air pollution, vehicle exhaust, and certain other combustion products led the committee that wrote the report to conclude that exposure to such substances is associated with an increased risk of lung cancer. For more information on the study, go to www4.nationalacademies.org/news.nsf/isbn/0309095271?OpenDocument.

AccessVA

A new web site, www.accessva.org, was recently launched through a joint initiative of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and the Virginia Housing and Development Authority (VDHA). The site features a wide-ranging collection of apartments that offer accessibility features, housing assistance and other information for people with disabilities.

Joint Leadership Council

The JLC met on December 7 and January 11. Agenda items included adoption of the JLC 2005 Legislative Agenda and Mission and Vision Statements. At its January 11 meeting, the JLC also voted to establish an ad hoc committee to examine Virginia's veterans benefits as compared to other states. The next meeting of the JLC is scheduled for February 23, 2005, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the American Legion Department of Virginia, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue in Richmond.

Board of Veterans Services

The Board met on December 13 and heard a presentation from a representative of the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) on its study and recommendations to meet the immediate budget needs of DVS. The Board also voted to make increasing the number of veterans service officers its number one priority. Board Chairman, John Anderson, announced that he will establish an ad hoc committee to examine strategic planning goals that would correlate with DVS funding objectives. The next Board meeting is scheduled for March 28, 2005, from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., at the Virginia War Memorial, 621 South Belvidere Street in Richmond.

Veterans Services Foundation

The Foundation's Board of Trustees met on December 17. Board of Veterans Services Chairman John Anderson briefed the Trustees on the DPB budget recommendations. The Trustees voted to have the Foundation apply for IRS status as a 501(c)(3) organization. The Trustees also voted to approve a disbursement of over \$16,000 from the Veterans Services Fund for the Virginia Veterans Care Center's (VVCC's) *Operation Holiday Spirit* and for the purchase of the Clavinova for the VVCC. The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is scheduled for March 28, 2005, from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m., at the Virginia War Memorial, 621 South Belvidere Street in Richmond.